

State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children:

My name is Elaine Zimmerman. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on Children and I am here today in Support of **SB 273** and **HB 5325**.

Access to early care and education for vulnerable children, including teen parents and newly unemployed families is paramount for the young child's school success. A child's brain develops to 90% of its capacity by age five. Lifelong learning patterns take primary shape before a child enters first grade.

Teens and unemployed families face known stressors which take their toll on infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Assuring constant and nurturing care for the child while the parent is in high school or looking for a job, decreases these stressors, allows the parent to improve their situation and assists the child's optimal development.

SB 273 erases obstacles to early care for those parents who currently face barriers to care but are high need. This bill helps teen parent's access care who are not receiving cash assistance under TANF if they are enrolled in high school and regularly attending classes. It allows just the teen parents income, rather than the grandparent's income, to determine eligibility for care. Teen parents are considered high risk for toxic stress, child abuse, academic deficits, and poverty.

SB 273 also opens access to early care for families who were using child care, but due to a birth or loss of job, are not working. Our system of child care eligibility is not designed for a long and uncharted recession. It is based on parents working. In a good economy it makes full sense to base eligibility on working parents. But in a bad or slow economy, when many are not working and others are losing their jobs with no notice, child care is still necessary. Growing numbers of '99ers' show us that jobs are hard to find. What once took a few weeks to a few months, is now taking over two years. This bill extends child care eligibility for a parent who loses his or her job for six months.

The Children and Recession Task Force in hearings held throughout the state, heard from parents at every hearing, about the need for child care for unemployed parents. Parents also talked about the need for child care while they improved their economic prospects by attending college. The Urban Institute, hired to design an economic model analysis for our poverty reduction work, cited key interventions to reduce child poverty within a decade in our state. Among the key five strategies that were paramount, was access to child care.